A STUDY ON PSYCHOSOCIAL CONCERNS OF

WOMEN EMPLOYEES IN BPO SECTOR IN BANGALORE AND MANGALORE CITIES, KARNATAKA STATE

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Abstract

The present study “A Study On Psychosocial Concerns Of Women Employees in BPO Sector in Bangalore and Mangalore Cities, Karnataka State” is expected to describe an objective picture on specific problems like job related and psychosocial concerns, mental health, work stress, coping mechanisms, safety provisions and job satisfaction of women employees working in BPO sector. This study looks at various psychosocial concerns of women working in call centres in Bangalore and Mangalore cities, based on a survey of 250 women employees. It examines the women working in night shifts, as well as the impact of call centre employment on women's mental health, family life, work stress and job satisfaction. The study examines the impact of job related factors on the well-being of women employees and performance. Findings suggest that psychosocial factors like job strain, depression, hostility, anxiety, and social isolation tend to cluster in certain women. A significant association was found between psychological unwellness and job satisfaction. The outcome of such a study will definitely benefit Social Workers, Mental Health Professionals, parents, women employees, employers, academicians, Counsellors, Government and society at large.

Keywords: Psychosocial concerns, Mental Health, Work Stress, Coping Mechanisms, Job Related Factors, Job Satisfaction in BPO sector.

INTRODUCTION

India being a developing economy has seen a major change over the last few decades in the social and economic status of women. The role played by women has shifted from docile, fettered, dependent female to that of being independent, explorative towards their potential and voicing their concerns openly.

The journey of women towards socio-economic empowerment has crossed several milestones in urban areas and precisely, in metros like Mumbai, Bangalore, Chennai, Hyderabad, and New Delhi, where the growing awareness among women towards `working culture' proves this trend.. It has become a reality that women can equal men; if possible surpass them in all respects. The current status of the industrial sector stands witness to the proposition that the women's contribution to the growth of this organization has become an indisputable fact leading to several enactments to ensure equitable treatment to woman workers.

Women constitute half of the resources of the nation. The women employed in IT and ITES sectors belong to the younger age group. Girls in India prefer working at call centres in order to earn the kind of money that could not have been dreamed of at their age. In order to earn high, they work odd hours and adopt an unreal identity which is far removed from their own realities.

The most challenging role that women who choose careers play is not just related to work but has more to do with balancing the natural responsibilities of home and family and work. This trait of multi-tasking makes women enjoy the bliss of career and family at the same time. What truly sets aside the sector from other industries in India is the fact that it has remained gender neutral from the onset, providing equal opportunities for both men and women. Women in fact, contribute significantly to the success of companies and the IT-BPO industry.

Participation of women in BPOs is rapidly growing and is expected to go up. The number of professionals increased from 6800 in 1985 to 650,000 in 2003-2004 (NASSCOM 2004). In the call centre industry, career development takes place through hard work, training, application and continuity in learning. The industry requires long hours of work. Stress is, therefore, inevitable and cannot be avoided as uncertainties and unexpected

changes keep occurring in the environment. Majority of women are affected by life-cycle factors such as marriage, child-birth and sexual division of labor within the household.

BPO is typically categorized as back office outsourcing, which includes internal business functions, and front office outsourcing, which includes customer-related services. The employees at the call center have to listen, watch, and speak simultaneously without a break. Erratic working hours along with sedentary job that demands sitting on a chair for long hours each day, reading prescript conversations on the phone endlessly may result in musculoskeletal and psychological strain. Long working hours, permanent night shifts, lack of social and family interactions, incredibly high work targets, loss of identity, coupled with high disposable income at a young age may predispose the BPO employees to different forms of dependence.

Psycho-Social Concerns of Women Employees in BPO

With rapidly changing workplaces, unique occupational health hazards are emerging. Traditional industrial health concerns were related more to the physical health domain. Emerging new occupations particularly in Information Technology (IT) and IT enabled Services (ITES), pose a host of new health challenges particularly those related to mental and social health. For workers employed in the call center sector, the daily experience is of repetitive, intensive and stressful work, which frequently results in employee "burnout". Job pressure, disruptive family relations, poor recreation opportunities at call centers may adversely affect social health. Call centre workers face unique occupational hazards - mental, physical and psychosocial. A high proportion of workers face sleeps disturbances and associated mental stress and anxiety.

Most of the problems that beset working women are in reality rooted in the social perspective of the position of women. Traditionally men are seen as the bread winners and women as the house-keepers, child bearers and those who rear. This typecast role model continues to put obstacles before the working women. Women face problems like changing roles and bearing dual responsibilities, one in family and the other in jobs. Job strain, role conflict, sexual harassment and inadequate household help are some of the social problems.

Psychosocial refers to one’s psychological development in and interaction with social environment. Psychosocial problems included disruption in family life, use of tobacco

and alcohol, depression, anxiety, lack of concentration, loss of interest in everyday activities, burnout, hostility, aggression, absence from work and faulty eating habits. Considerable pressure to meet performance quotas and the resultant fears of being sent home, denied promotion or losing their jobs if these standards were not met are common social issues faced by women in call centres.

Review of Literature

Women have made significant strides in all fields, although their number remains insignificant. The availability of brighter prospects for women in employment sector, in recent times, has been the outcome of growing credibility for their proven track record of achievements in various fields.

"Women in Call Centres" published in the Economic and Political Weekly (2005) found serious health problems associated with the call centre industry, particularly those working late night shifts. It said, "90% of the respondents have no social life or interaction with people in the family."

Adesh Goyal, Executive Vice President & General Manager, Hughes BPO Services, commented at a seminar on Outsourcing held in November 2006, "Half of the employees smoke too much and many quit the industry due to stress." People at call centres are relatively young and without specific training in stress management, they are ill-equipped to handle rude customers on the phone.

Work force at call centres are under constant stress -because of their work load, competitive pressure and surveillance, staff in this sector reported health problems such as nervousness, chronic fatigue, body ache, insomnia, nausea and anxiety, restlessness and depression due to odd working hours and stress. Jake Skeers, (2005).

Articles published in Indian Feminist and Labor Publication are much more critical of call centre employment, many calling the workers "Cyber Coolies". Some of the problems highlighted in the articles are: -

- High pressure to meet unreasonable quotas. (Mujumdar 2004)
- A majority of women are engaged in dead-end careers where the workers do not ever move up the job ladder within their organization. (Remesh, 2004, P. 27)

- Lack of opportunities for promotion or acquiring transferable skills. (The Voice of the Working Women, 2004)
- Loss of identity created by serving the foreign customers and speaking foreign accent. (The Voice of the Working Women, 2004).

A study was carried out by National Commission for Women, New Delhi (2006) to study the role of women in the present economic and business environment in India. The sample consisted of 272 participants, including 216 women doing night shift work at least for the past 6 months, 56 employers and supervisors, and various key persons of leading organizations like universities, police authorities, law enforcing agencies, hospitals, and industrialists. The age of participants ranged from 20 to 50 years; and they were randomly chosen from different BPOs, hospitals, textiles, garments and leather units from 9 different cities.

Software analysis of women employees in the information technology industry reveals that more women employees are visible at call centres in north and western India, while the trend is yet to catch on in the South, except for Bangalore. The number of women employed at the agent level and the middle management level was high. Sleeping disorders were observed among 83% women and voice loss was reported by 8.5% women. Other health problems found were ear problems (8.5%), digestive disorders (14.9%) and eye-sight problems (10.6%). Call centre employees were under constant stress because of their workload, competitive pressure and surveillance. Night shift work has also been cited as one of the major reasons for women leaving their jobs, along with high stress levels and long working hours. The study recommended that no women should be denied employment in BPOs/ call centres on the ground that the employment entails working night shifts. Contrary clauses in various existing legislations should be suitably amended. Women workers should not be dismissed for reasons connected with pregnancy or child birth. Employers should ensure that adequate facilities are provided from the place of work to the nearest point of their residence. Call centres should also ensure that a security guard escorts women in official transport.

Another survey, carried out by union UNISON on call centres in Scotland in 2002, found even higher levels of stress. This study, of 500 UNISON members in call centres, found three-quarters (75%) felt ‘stressed’. The survey reported 82% suffered headaches, 78%

respiratory problems, 61% pains in hands, arms or back and 32% other work-associated health problems.

A study of call centre conditions, by the Health and Safety Executive in 1999, identified insufficient breaks and repetitive work as significant problems. The research, published as guidance called "Initial Advice regarding Call Centre Working Practices", found staff complained the job was monotonous rather than stressful. But the researchers identified several stress symptoms including headaches, migraines, high sickness rates and high turnover.

A further study by the HSE, published in 2001, found that half of call centre staff had their performance continually monitored by electronic systems – a practice many workers say they find stressful. About four out of five staff had the duration of their calls and the time lags between them monitored. Over half the staff interviewed had to 'hot desk'. Following this research, the HSE has issued advice on improving working conditions and reducing stress in call centres.

Workers in information technology (IT) - enabled services like business process outsourcing and call centers working with visual display units are reported to have various health and psycho social disorders. Evidence from previously published studies in peer- reviewed journals and internet sources were examined to explore health disorders and psycho-social problems among personnel employed in IT-based services, for a systematic review on the topic. In addition, authors executed a questionnaire- based pilot study. The available literature and the pilot study, both suggest health disorders and psychosocial problems among workers of Business Process Outsourcing. Kesavachandran C, Rastogi S.K, Das M, Khan A.M. (2006)

The prevalence of job stress, distribution of major job stressors, and associations between perceived job stress levels and multiple physical discomforts are assessed via a cross-sectional study of 1023 male and female operators at telecommunication call centers in Taiwan. Cases of discomfort are identified via questionnaire surveys requiring respondents to self-reported symptoms of discomfort. Information is obtained on demographics, health status, perceived job stress levels, major job stressors and psychosocial job characteristics. Female operators had higher prevalence of physical discomfort than male operators for all body areas. 'Encountering difficult customers' ranked as the most important job stress factor among both male and female operators.

Working in a call center for more than 4 years is strongly associated with discomfort in all body areas (odds ratio ranges from 1.65 to 2.15). Analysis of risk factors vs. physical discomfort reveals that operators who perceive higher job stress have significantly increased risk of several health complaints, including eye strain, tinnitus, hoarse or painful throat, chronic cough with phlegm, chest tightness, irritable stomach or peptic ulcers, frequent urination and musculoskeletal discomfort. Yen-Hui Lina, Chih-Yong Chenb and Shih-Yi Lua (2008)

The nature of parental support available to unmarried call center women agents in India was explored by Shelly Tara P. Vigneswara Ilavarasan's (2010). It has been found that parental support is crucial to night time call center employment in the context of a dominant patriarchal society in India. Instrumental aid in terms of supporting the daughters' night work life is provided by mothers, whereas empathetic support for the employment is given primarily by the fathers. Women retain control over their earnings, contributing income to the family both directly and indirectly. However, call center work remains transient due to the absence of social support required for continuing call center employment in the marital home.

Background of the Study

In the 21st Century especially after the adoption of new economic policy in the country, women have assumed a more significant role in the economic development. NASSCOM officials said that women accounted for more than 30 per cent of entry-level workforce of the industry and that overall, there were six lakh women working in the IT-BPO industry in India. While the exact number of women at various levels in the Indian IT industry is not available due to lack of gender disaggregated data, it is estimated that they constitute 21 per cent of the total IT workforce which is higher than their participation in the national economy as a whole at 13 per cent.

Although BPOs have quickly changed the woman's status in the family, they have been slow in improving their social status. Employment in BPOs for women is still considered to be less dignified work due to odd working hours such as night shifts, and is also sexually stigmatised. However the image of BPOs constantly being projected as women-friendly, the pursuance of the policy of zero tolerance for sexual harassment in the workplace, and transportation facilities for picking and dropping have all gradually shed the urban middle class inhibitions in acknowledging that their daughters work in BPOs.

Women employed in BPOs are no longer bound by the traditional patterns of family control over daughters. Financial independence provided by employment in BPOs has empowered women to be assertive and independent in their outlook, attitude and career choice. The gender neutral and international working atmosphere in BPOs has the potential to further women empowerment.

The present study is expected to generate an objective picture on specific problems like psychosocial and job related concerns, mental health, work stress, coping strategies, family support, safety provisions and job satisfaction. The outcome of such a study will definitely benefit social workers, parents, women, employees, employers, academicians, mental health professionals, government and society at large. These stakeholders can have a better understanding of the concerns faced by women employees so that suitable orientation and development programmes can be formulated to tackle the occupational hazards faced by them. The government can play an active role through introduction of suitable legislations and clear grievance redressal procedures to help them have a better working life for women in this industry.

Scope

The present study aims to examine the psychological and social concerns, stress and other job related issues/problems of women employees working in the BPO/Call Centre sectors. The population comprised of selected few BPO/Call Centres in Bangalore and Mangalore cities. The research explores the psychological, social and mental health, coping strategies, family support, work stress and job related effects on the women employees and their job satisfaction.

Aim

This study aims to provide a clear picture of the impact of job related factors on the well-being of women employees and performance.

Specific Objectives of the Study

- To examine the profile of Women Employees in BPO.
- To identify Psycho-Social Concerns of Women Employees in BPO Sector.

- To identify the job related factors that cause job satisfaction in Women Employees.
- To determine the various work stressors affecting Women Employees working in BPOs.
- To analyse the effect of the work stress on Women Employees in BPOs.
- To assess the existing coping mechanisms of women in BPOs.
- To examine the role of Employers and Government in safety concerns of women in BPOs.

Hypotheses

1. Psychosocial problems and age of employees will be inversely proportional
2. Psychosocial problems and the economic class of women will be inversely proportional
3. There is a significant relationship between health status and psychosocial problems
4. Married women will have more occupational stress than unmarried women
5. Work stress and job satisfaction are inversely proportional
6. With an increase in family support, better will be the coping.

Research Design

The present study entitled "A Study on Psycho-Social concerns of Women Employees in BPO Sector, in Bangalore and Mangalore Cities, Karnataka state" can be described as a descriptive cross sectional survey study. The descriptive research studies are designed to obtain pertinent and precise information concerning the current status of phenomena and, whenever possible to draw valid generalizations, conclusions from the facts discovered. Survey studies are conducted to collect detailed description of existing phenomena with the intent of employing data to justify current conditions and practices or to make more intelligent plans for improving them. It is descriptive in the sense that it sets to describe the nature and distribution of variables, which involves the examination of psychological,

social concerns; work stress and job satisfaction of different women employees of selected few BPOs in Mangalore and Bangalore cities.

Universe of the Study

The universe for the present study comprised a few selected BPOs of Mangalore and Bangalore. The geographic universe for the present study consisted of women working in BPOs in the age group of above 20 years.

Sampling Design

The population for the study comprised of call centre women employees from few selected BPOs in Bangalore and Mangalore cities. The list of BPOs was obtained from the internet BPO listing. 5% of the sample BPOs was chosen using purposive non random sampling method, out of the 220 listed BPOs in Bangalore and 11 listed BPOs in Mangalore. 5% of the sample of women respondents in a few selected BPOs was chosen. Names of the companies that were taken for the study are kept confidential as per the request of these companies. The interview was conducted in a conducive and confidential environment.

Re-sampling had to be done due to non availability of consent to conduct research study in some companies. Out of the total 250 respondents, 80% of women respondents from a few selected BPOs in Bangalore and 20% of women respondents from Mangalore were taken for the study.

Procedure for Sample Selection

The first task of the investigator was to take a representative sample from the field of investigation. For this purpose 250 women employees from a few selected BPOs in Bangalore and Mangalore were selected. The technique of purposive non random sampling based on a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria was employed. The researcher with the permission of the company contacted each respondent personally and briefed them about the purpose and nature of study. The respondents were assured confidentiality and a consent form was filled by them. The investigator collected information from the women employees who were willing to cooperate for providing information.

Inclusive Criteria

- Women employees who are working in BPOs either in Bangalore, Mangalore cities.
- Women employees of BPOs in the age group of above 20 years were selected for the study.
- Women who were both married and unmarried, and working in a BPO company.

Exclusive Criteria

- Men working in BPOs were not included in the study.
- The women employees, who were not willing to be a part of the information source of study, were not interviewed.
- Women employees who were less than 19 years of age were not selected for the study.

Tools of Data Collection

The following tools were used for study based on the objectives:

1. Personal Data Questionnaire – was prepared by the researcher, to study the socio-demographic variables, comprising of information about age, experience, income, educational qualification level of satisfaction and other social – economic aspects.
2. Job Related Factors, Psychological concerns and Social concerns - The questionnaires on Job Related Factors, Psychological concerns and Social concerns was prepared by the researcher, to examine these issues faced by women employees in few selected BPOs. This was validated by mental health and HR professionals, social workers, educationist and academicians.
3. The General Health Questionnaire scale GHQ-28 developed by Sir David Goldberg and Hiller, (1979).
4. Stress Diagnostic Survey - the instrument chosen for measuring the work stress as perceived by individuals, developed by Ivancevich and Matteson, (1980).
5. Family Support Inventory created by King L.A.,Mattimore L.K.,King D.W. and Adams G.A.(1995) to assess the emotional sustenance and instrumental assistance.

6. Stress Response Checklist which measures the somatic, behavioural, emotional, and cognitive symptoms of stress. (SRC) (Verma, 1997).
7. Coping Checklist (CCL) - developed by Rao, Subbakrishna and Prabhu(1989), this checklist comprises of 70 items, describing a wide range of emotional, cognitive and behavioural responses that may be used to handle stress.
8. Job Satisfaction Questionnaire (JSS Paul E. Spector, 1994) - to assess employee attitudes about the job and aspects of the job.

Pretest

Pretest was done in order to test the suitability of the questionnaires and the scales for the study of women respondents in BPOs. A representative sample of 25 respondents participated in the pretest. All the instruments for data collection as well as the informed consent form were selected and administered on 25 respondents.

The outcome of the pretest revealed that the questionnaires were a little time consuming. It took a long time to administer all the instruments to the respondents. Some of them at times found it difficult to comprehend the questions and wanted clarifications. But the results showed the importance of the data collected and that it was useful for the study. Hence, all the tools were retained and it was used in the study.

Data Collection

The instruments were set in order along with consent form. The researcher was available for clarifications while the questionnaires were distributed to the respondents. While the data was collected, a letter stating the purpose of the study was mentioned. The collection of data spanned over a period of about eight months. The respondents were ensured confidentiality.

The questionnaires were being distributed and collected by the researcher directly. This ensured that all the questionnaires were promptly filled and returned. The respondents were given necessary clarifications whenever needed. The study gave good scope to interact with HR personnel and the respondents, and to develop a platform for further study.

The questionnaires collected from each company were checked to ensure that it was appropriately filled. In case of an inadequately filled questionnaire re sampling was done in the respective company and the inadequately filled questionnaires were replaced. Thus the data collection was completed obtaining it from a total of 250 respondent's completely filled questionnaires which were considered for the final study.

Statistical Analysis

The data collected with the help of the various tools used in the current study was first coded and entered into Excel sheet. The data was analyzed statistically by using Statistical package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 11.5 to suit research goals in Social Sciences.

The following steps were taken for the analysis:

- Descriptive statistics like Mean, Standard Deviation, number and percentages were used.
- Chi-square test was done. This test helps assess whether two mean scores show a statistically significant difference; the researcher uses a't' test. It is based on comparison of mean scores and standard deviation.
- One way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used. Analysis of variance is a test that determines the statistical significance of the difference among the mean scores of two or more groups on one or more variables.
- The Karl Pearson's product-moment Correlation Coefficient provides a single statistic (usually referred to as "r"), which indicates the precise magnitude of the linear association between two variables.

Limitations

The limitations of the study design must be acknowledged and findings must be interpreted with caution. First, some of the BPOs did not permit to conduct this survey. Therefore there was a delay in data collection.

Second, the time consumption for each set of questionnaire was too long and thus some of the chosen respondents were not willing to answer them. There was difficulty in meeting

the respondents in and off the premises. Third, the authorities did not easily permit the researcher to meet the respondents even in groups more than once, if there was a need. All these above causes created a barrier in obtaining the answers from the respondents and thus the researcher had to redo the sampling. This again was time consuming.

Chapterisation

Chapter 1 discusses the subject, background of study focusing on psychosocial issues of women working in BPOs. The introduction includes information related to women, BPOs, job related, health and stress issues and job satisfaction.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature relevant to the present study. Review highlights the outcome of previous research in the area of women employees, stress and problems faced by them in BPOs. The exercise of review of literature has helped researcher in identifying trends in studies both in Western and Indian literature.

Chapter 3 provides the blueprint of the study. It portrays the problem, the scope and the objectives of the study. This chapter discusses the hypotheses to be tested, details about data collection, research instruments used, pretest, compilation of the data and statistical analysis that are to be used.

Chapter 4 contains the statistical outcomes. The detailed analysis of the data has been presented here. This chapter being the most important part of the study enlightens the techniques used to understand the data gathered through the schedules. The results are discussed relating to the hypotheses and the objectives of the study.

Chapter 5 summarises the complete study in a nutshell by presenting the findings obtained through the analysis. The hypotheses is tested and discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 6 includes the conclusions, suggestions and recommendations. Further it discusses the implications of the study and suggestions for interventions and future research.

MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

Personal Background of the Respondents

The majority of respondents (82.0%) fall under the age group of 29 years. The mean age of respondents is 26 years. This is a very significant characteristic of the Call centre /BPO women employees. There is almost an even distribution of married (49.6%) and single (48.8%) women employees in Call centre / BPO because it is income generating.

The urban area representation (70.4%) is significantly higher than the respondents coming from rural areas (6.4%) only 23.2% are from semi urban areas and the majority live in nuclear family type (78%). More than half (57.6%) of respondents have degree education background, 23.2% are post graduates, 10.4% have other qualifications and 8.8% are engineers.

Respondents who have less than one year of experience are 30.4 %, which supports the distinct nature of BPO employees. A significant number of respondents (21.6%) have remained in this industry and have more than 6 years of experience. A majority of the respondents (67.2%) earn less than rupees 2.0 lakhs per year. 32.8% respondents earn more than rupees 2 lakhs per year. Distribution based on respondent's hours of work shows that, more than 82.4% work for 7-9 hours a day.

Job Related Factors

Results indicate that the respondents (50.4%) face negative job related factors at work. It could be inferred from the results that certain work factors prove to be a barrier for the respondents, though the difference is insignificant. 49.6% of the respondents perceive that job related factors are conducive in their work.

But interestingly, 61.2% of respondents in the age group below 24 years reported that job related negative factors affect them at work place. 48.3% of the respondents in 25-29 range of age felt that negative job related factors do have an impact on their work.

Negative job related factors have a greater impact on married women (59.7%) than unmarried women (56.6%). Majority of the respondents (60.3%) living in semi urban areas have job related concerns, followed by respondents (57.4%) living in urban areas and (56.3%) from rural areas.

Of the respondents belonging to nuclear families, 56.6% have various personal and organizational factors affecting them when compared to joint families (63.0%) who have negative job related factors affecting their lives.

Overall results of educational status, show that majority (58%) of the respondents have job related concerns. Job related concerns are more in the new entrants with less than one year experience (68.4%) than the respondents with 2-3 years of experience (42.0%). Respondents with 4-5 years of experience (58.8%) face problems in their jobs. The statistical results show significant relationship between job related factors and experience of work ($p=0.011$).

Respondents with higher income (63.4%) have negative job related factors affecting them compared to respondents in the 1.6 to 1.8 lakhs (44.9%) and 1.2 to 1.5 lakhs (59.8%) category. Majority (61.4%) of the respondents who work for more than the stipulated time have negative factors related to the job affecting them compared to 57.3% of the respondents working normal hours.

Psychological and Social Concerns of women employees

The mean scores for social concerns (24.884) are higher than psychological concerns (15.732). From the analysis it is observed that majority of the respondents are dissatisfied with their social life. These may be attributed to the fact of extended working hours, non-regular life style, safety, discrimination, no time for socialisation and work pressure which are reflected in social behavior of the call center employees.

The results highlight the fact that social and psychological concerns exist for women in all age groups. The mean score of married women in the domains of psychological health (15.911) is observed to be high. The mean score of married women in the domains of social health (24.758) is observed to be lower than single respondents (25.073). The mean scores indicates higher psychological concerns for respondents (16.062) coming from urban areas than semi urban (14.879), followed by rural (15.187). Whereas the mean score indicates higher social concerns for respondents (26.312) coming from rural areas than urban (24.823), followed by semi urban (24.672). Respondents coming from Nuclear families (41.224) have greater Psychosocial Concerns compared to respondents from Joint Families (38.4074).

Mean values in psychosocial concerns are more in postgraduates (40.517) than engineers (36.090) which indicate that they were not satisfied performing their jobs compared to engineers. The significance is very high (p=<0.001) for psychological concerns with regard to experience and education. Statistical results show significance at p=0.041 level between education groups with regards to psychosocial concerns. The mean score for psychological concerns for women with less than 1 year of experience was low at 37.486 and high mean score at 43.667 for women with 4-5 years of experience.

On the social domain high mean score is at 27.449 for women with income range 1.6 to 1.8 lakhs per year. Lower mean score of 23.857 is seen in women with income range 1.9 to 2.0 lakhs per year. The psychological domain for income groups 1.2 to 1.5 lakhs per year exhibits lower mean score of 14.767 and high mean of 18.571 for income range 1.9 to 2 lakhs per year.

The mean scores indicate that respondents with long working hours have higher psychosocial concern (40.727) than respondents with stipulated work hours (40.592).

Overall Health Status of Women working in BPOs

The maximum score in GHQ on all sub-divisions are 7 and minimum is .00. It reflects that lower the score the better is the general well-being of respondents.

Statistical results showed a very high significance at p= <0.001 for all age groups with regard to somatic symptoms. The mean score is less (1.123) in 25-29 years of age groups and high (2.680) in 30-34 years of age groups. The mean scores showed a significant difference for all age groups with regard to anxiety and insomnia.

The statistical results indicate high significance in the dimensions of social dysfunction (p=0.01) severe depression (p=0.004) and in total General Health Score at (p=0.009). Age affects psychological distress in subjects mainly through the factor ‘somatic’ than anxiety and insomnia.

Majority of the sub-divisions did not show any statistical significance with regard to marital status except social dysfunction (p=0.004). The mean scores were low for single (.967), followed by married women (1.233). The mean scores were higher on all domains of general health from respondents coming from rural areas.

Most of the sub-divisions did not show any statistical significance with regard to family type. However very high significance at p=<0.001 is observed in the domain of social dysfunction only. Result indicates that psychological distress does exist among the educated. Statistical results shows no significant difference (p=.176) level between education groups with regards to general health status.

Statistical significance is shown in all sub-divisions except in social dysfunction with regards to experience. However very high significance (p=<0.001) is shown in somatic symptoms and severe depression with regard to experience. Mean scores were high (2.763) in those below 1 year of experience. As years of experience decreased, psychological problems increased in respondents. Respondents with above 6 years of experience had a high mean of 2.759 and low mean of 1.666 is seen in 2-3 years of experience group.

A very high significance (p=<0.001) is seen for somatic and severe depression. Mean scores is high (2.500) in respondents for somatic domain and severe depression (2.107) who earned less than 1.5 lakhs per year. This finding suggests that respondents who earned low annual income are more affected than others in the income group.

Statistical significance is not shown in all sub-divisions except in social dysfunction (p=0.033) level with regard to work hours. Thus, when respondents worked for long hours their ability to cope with daily problems and social life is affected.

Coping Strategies used by Women Employees

It could be inferred from the mean score for emotion focussed strategies are the highest (7.626) with the lowest being distraction (2.324).This shows that women use emotional strategies to cope with problems rather than distraction which is not used frequently. Women used acceptance (6.596) as their effective coping strategy to overcome problems that they face. The respondents did not rely too much on religion (3.464) and denial (5.084) as their coping mechanisms to problems faced in their lives. They focus on their problems (6.132) to resolve any concerns faced by them.

There is significant relationship (p=0.017) between age and coping strategies adopted by respondents. The mean scores depicted for age 25-29 years is low (29.516) and high (33.80) in the 30-34 age range. In the coping strategy adopted by respondents, the mean

scores were higher in single respondents (32.737) compared to respondents who were married (31.395).

Coping did not show any significance in their p values with regard to native place (p=.187). High SD (13.757) and mean score (36.062) is shown by respondents coming from rural areas. The respondents from urban areas showed a low SD (9.032) and mean score (31.505). Respondents from joint family had high mean score of 33.759 compared to nuclear (31.551). This shows that Social support system in joint family is better than nuclear family which in turn improves the coping mechanisms for them.

The mean values indicate that engineers (35.545) cope with their jobs better than post graduates (31.189). The engineers may have the knowledge and skills that is required by this industry and thus enabling them to learn faster and improve their skills from time to time which in turn decrease stress and improve coping strategies.
The mean scores in coping strategy is high (34.263) in women with less than one year of experience respondents. The 4-5 years of experience and above 6 years respondents had a low mean score of 28.529 and 30.092 respectively.

High significant relationship is seen in income earned and coping strategy (p=0.008). Respondents earning 1.2 to 1.5 lakhs per year had a high mean score of 34.008, as compared to respondents earning between 1.6 to 1.8 lakhs per year who had low mean score of 29.693.

The results showed a higher SD (10.03) and mean scores (32.398) on coping strategy with regard to the normal hours of work in a day. SD (8.401) and mean scores (30.295) were lower for respondents working more than 10 hours a day.

Family Support in Women working in BPOs

Family background and support play an important role for women to achieve independence and move above the confines of a male-dominated traditional society. For most women in India, financial stability in the household and family support is critical for their success. In the results it is seen that the mean scores are higher in the domain of emotional sustenance (93.204) and lower in instrumental assistance (47.556).

The result shows that there is significance difference between age groups with regard to emotional sustenance and overall family support. The mean scores indicate that respondents above 35 years of age perceived higher family support in the dimensions of emotional sustenance (97.350) and instrumental assistance (50.450) compared to respondents in other age groups.

Married and single respondents had small variations in mean scores in all dimensions. However high significance (p=0.009) is shown in instrumental assistance, as compared to emotional sustenance (p=0.023) and overall family support (p=0.015).

There is a high significance with regard to native place in the dimensions of emotional sustenance (p=0.013), instrumental assistance domain(p=0.003) and overall family support (p=0.005). Higher mean scores were shown by respondents coming from rural areas with regards to emotional sustenance (97.125) and instrumental assistance (50.062).

On the emotional front the mean scores remain high at 93.724 for respondents coming from nuclear family. On the domain of instrumental assistance the mean scores is high for respondents coming from joint family (48.868). Statistical results shows very high significant difference (p= < 0.001) between education groups with regards to family support. Mean scores is high for others at 53.346 and low for post graduates at 34.224.

There is statistical significance in emotional sustenance (p=0.018) and overall family support (p=0.03) by respondents from all groups of experience. The mean scores for instrumental assistance showed small variations in respondents from all groups of experience. Respondents with less number of years of experience showed higher mean values (145.526).

Results show that respondents who worked for more than stipulated hours had a high mean score of (141.159) than who worked for normal hours (140.674).

Work Stress Experienced by Women

Women are more likely to arrive to work, stressed before their workplace demands begin. The mean is 68.677 and SD score is 28.551 with regard to work stress. Call centers have unique factors which cause stress like odd timings, disturbed sleep habits, odd eating times changing of the biological clock, monotony of the job and time away from kith and kin.

Results showed no statistical significance with regard to work stress and age. Respondents of age 20-24 and 25-29 (52.6% and 58.4%) respectively were more stressed than those in age range of 30-34 years (36%). No statistical significance is seen with regard to work stress and marital status (p=0.095). Results showed that 52.4% of married and 54.9% of unmarried subjects were stressed compared to 47.6% of married and 45.1% of unmarried subjects.

Median scores indicate that work stress is higher in respondents from rural respondents (62.5%). The result shows very high significance (p=0.009) for family type with regards to work stress. Results showed that work stress is higher in respondents from joint family (68.5%) than 48.5% from nuclear family.

Higher stress at (76.9%) is seen in other group of respondents than engineers who face low stress (40.9%). Respondents (72.5%) with 4-5 years of work experience had higher work stress than 2-3 years of experience respondents (46.4%). It is seen that work stress is low in below 3 years of work experience. Work stress increases, as the years of experience in respondents increased. Results are significant (p=0.018) with regard to work stress and work experience of respondents.

It is seen that 64.6% of respondents who are earning more than 2 lakhs per year have high work stress than 28.6% of respondents who are earning 1.9 to 2 lakhs per year. Results show that 72.7% of women who work more than 10 hours per day are stressed as compared to 48.5% of women who worked for normal hours.

Stress Response of Women working in BPOs

Stress is a bio-psycho-social phenomena which shows up mentally (e.g. depressed or racing thoughts), behaviorally (e.g. changes to diet and sleep), socially (e.g. aggression or withdrawing) and biologically (e.g. psychosomatic illness and aches and pains).

The mean for stress response is 49.112 and maximum is 114. The overall stress score shows 51.2% of the respondents have a low stress score.

Statistical results show high significance (p=0.008) with regard to age and stress response. In the age category of above 35 years, 65% of women faced higher stress than in the age category of 25-29 years where 37.1% of women felt stressed. Married women

(54%) responded to stress more than 46% of single women response. Similarly a difference is seen among stress response in women coming from rural areas(62.5%) as compared to 37.5 % from urban areas.

It is observed that 54.1% of respondents from nuclear family were stressed as compared to 59.3% of respondents from joint family. The stress response in post graduates (32.8%) is less than in engineers (63.6%). Statistical results shows significant difference (p=0.011) between education groups with regards to stress response.

Median scores indicate that 61.4% of respondents working for long hours responded to stress show very high significance (p=0.003). 61.6% of respondents who earned low income were stressed.

61.4% of the respondents working for long hours and 61.6% who earn a low income were also stressed . This results are highly significant (p= 0.003)

Job Satisfaction of Women Employees in BPOs

There is an interesting relationship between pay and satisfaction. People, who live in developing countries, usually correlate pay with satisfaction and in turn with happiness. But it is observed that where an individual attains a specific level of satisfaction this relation disappears. Jobs that are compensated handsomely have average job satisfaction levels no higher than those that are paid much less. Studies show that most of the workers felt satisfied when they are paid more adequately for the work performed by them. The relative importance of pay would probably be a changing factor in job satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

There are many factors that lead to job satisfaction and some of the factors highlighted by the respondents mean scores , Coworkers (14.680), nature of work (14.640), fringe benefits (14.548), promotion (14.272), contingent rewards (13.876), pay (13.876), Supervision (13.580), communication (13.484) and operating conditions (12.976).

Team work is a typical characteristic of call centre. Hence, in this study the coworker factor is largely responsible for job satisfaction among respondents. Women respondents have a tendency to give importance to communication and relationship, but findings of this study are in contrary to the general tendency.

The statistical results shows that there is high significant relationship (p=0.007) between Job Satisfaction and promotion dimension of age variable. High mean scores were seen in most of the dimensions in the age group of 30-34 years which means that older respondents were satisfied compared to the young ones.

Respondents in all age group showed minor variations in mean scores with regard to supervision received. Statistical results shows significant relationship between age group and Fringe Benefits (p=0.012), operating conditions (p=0.013) and coworkers (p=0.023). The mean scores showed respondents above 30 years of age had a high mean for Fringe Benefits and coworkers support. On the domain of operating conditions the below 24 years age group showed high mean of 13.767. A very high significance between age group and contingent rewards at p= <0.001 level is seen. Mean scores determine higher job satisfaction in below 24 years age group (14.569) and low mean in above 35 years of age (12.150).

The mean scores were high in 30-34 years (16.280) and low (13.750) for above 35 years of age. However the statistical results shows high significant relationship (p=0.004) between age group and nature of work. The mean scores were low for age groups 25-29 years (12.932) and high for above 35 years of age (14.150). Statistical results shows no significant relationship (p=0. 233) between age group and Communication.

For supervision the mean and SD scores were similar for married and single respondents. However the statistical results showed very high significant relationship (p=<0. 001). The results for fringe benefits shows high mean of 20.00 in respondents who are divorced and small variations in married and single respondents (14.177 and 14.745). However the statistical results showed very high significant relationship (p=0. 002) between marital status and fringe benefits received.

Significant relationship (p=0. 022) between marital status and contingent rewards is seen with regard to job satisfaction. Mean scores indicate that married respondents are more satisfied (14.145) than divorcees (10.00). Mean scores of divorcees with regard to operating conditions were low at 6.00 and single women scored high at 13.823. However the statistical results showed very high significant relationship (p=<0. 001).

Significant relationship (p=0. 070) between marital status and nature of work domain is seen. Mean scores for a married respondents is low at 14.379 and high for divorcees at 18.00.

The mean scores indicate that rural respondents were more satisfied (14.437) with the pay received than the urban respondents (13.8693). In the domain of promotion, respondents from urban areas (14.4148) expressed satisfaction than semi- urban areas (13.9138).

In the supervision received by women respondents from rural background (14.1875) showed better satisfaction than women from urban areas (13.409).

Rural respondents (13.687) were not satisfied with types of contingent rewards compared to semi- urban (14.258) respondents who were more satisfied. Respondents from semi-urban (12.551) background were not satisfied compared to rural respondents (13.250) in relation to operating conditions provided.

A very high significant relationship (p=<0. 001) is seen between operating conditions and type of family. In this sub-division high mean score of 14.388 for joint family type and low mean of 12.586 for Nuclear family was seen. Type of family does not seem to play an influencing role in other major sub-divisions of job satisfaction.

In the domain of promotion high mean score of 14.367 for Nuclear family and low for joint family 13.925 is seen. Respondents from both types of families showed negligent differences in mean scores (13.581 and 13.574) with regard to supervision received. Respondents from joint family were satisfied with contingent rewards (14.370) received than respondents from nuclear family (13.887). The respondents from nuclear and joint family were satisfied equally with their coworkers and communication systems. On the domain of nature of work, respondents from joint family (15.166) were more satisfied than respondents from nuclear family (14.494).

Very high significant difference at p= < 0.001 level between education groups and job satisfaction is seen. Mean values shows that job satisfaction levels are higher at 38.909 for respondents who are engineers and lower for post graduates (21.137). Further the SD scores shows that job satisfaction levels are higher for respondents who are comparatively less qualified, the degree (18.500) and others (16.879).

Experience does not seem to play a major role in majority of the sub-divisions of job satisfaction. In the domain of promotion high mean score of 14.947 for new entrants and low for respondents with 4-5 years of experience. However the statistical results showed significant relationship (p=0. 05).

Operating conditions with respect to experience showed very high significant relationship (p=<0. 001). Respondents who had less than 1 year of experience showed high mean score of 14.184 and above 6 years of experience had low mean score of 11.925.

A high significant relationship at p=0. 003 level between all categories of experiences with regards to contingent rewards. The above 6 years of experience respondents had a low mean score of 13.018 as compared to respondents who have 2-3 years of experience who show high mean score of 14.869.

Respondents who had less than 1 year of experience for communication showed high mean score of 14.381(SD 3.089) and 4-5 years of experience had low mean score of 12.647(SD3.230).

Respondents who had less than 1 year of experience showed in domain of pay high mean score of 14.486 and in range of 2-3 years of experience showed low mean score of 13.405.

Supervision domain had no much variation in mean score among respondents upto 5 years of experience. Respondents above 6 years of experience had a low mean of 12.981. The mean scores showed that new entrants were satisfied with fringe benefits received (15.105) compared to respondents with 4-5 years of experience (13.902). The respondents who had less than 1 year of experience been happy with nature of work (15.184) compared to respondents with 4-5 years of experience (13.882). High mean score of 15.142 for respondents earning 1.9-2.0 lakhs per year and low mean score for respondents earning 1.6-1.8 lakhs per year is seen in the study.

For promotion results indicate high mean score (14.892) for respondents earning below1.5 lakhs per year and low mean score (12.857) for respondents earning 1.6-1.8 lakhs per year.

In contingent rewards mean score (15.285) is high for respondents earning 1.9 to 2.0 lakhs per year and low (13.036) for respondents earning more than 2.0 lakhs per year.

However the statistical results showed very high significant relationship (p= < 0. 001) with regards to promotion and contingent rewards and various groups of income. It can be inferred that respondents who earn their contingent rewards and promotion have remained satisfied in their jobs.

High significance at p=0.002 level was observed with regards to earnings and operating conditions. The mean score was high (15.276) for respondents earning above rupees 1.5 lac and low 12.571 for income group rupees1.9 to 2.0 lakhs per year. However significance of p= 0.022 is seen in income earned in various groups with regard to nature of work.

High mean scores for promotion and supervision (14.436 and 13.733) is seen for respondents working less than 9 hours a day and low mean scores (13.500, 12.863) for above 10 hours of work respectively.

Results shows no significance p= 0.091 with regards to Nature of work and working hours. High mean scores14.801 for normal working hours and low mean scores13.886 for above 10 hours of work is seen.

Correlation between Study Variables

The Correlation is done between all study variables and the results of those variables are presented below:

A very high significant positive correlation (p=<0.001) is seen between Coping and job satisfaction; Stress response and work stress; Overall health and family support; Psycho-social problems and work stress; Stress response and psycho-social concerns.

A very high significant negative correlation (p=<0.001) is seen between job satisfaction and stress response; and a high significant correlation between job satisfaction and job related factors (p=0.009); between job satisfaction and psycho-social concerns (p=0.002)

The association between other variables did not show high significance. The respondent's had frequent headaches, feeling of fatigue, sleeping disorders and frustration which have become regular problems for them. With no time for personal life, the erratic schedules and monotonous work of business process outsourcing disturbs the family life of the women employees adding to their frustrations. Call centers and BPOs have unique factors

which cause stress like odd timings, disturbed sleep habits, odd eating times changing the biological clock, monotony of the job and time away from family all of which contributes to stress.

Role of Employers

Awareness about the health issues peculiar to this industry has now come to the fore with a public clamour to regularise the rules governing BPOs. This was after a recent survey showed that at least 1/3 of the employees had sleep problems while a quarter of them had gastro and digestive problems due to the irregular timings and in take of fast food. At least 1/5 suffered from eye related problems and what shook everyone was that they were all in their early twenties. All these ailments will eventually lead to more severe diseases like heart, stomach, weight problems and psychological problems leading to severe depression.

It is the duty of the management of these BPOs to ensure that their employees are healthy and happy and to see that their odd timings due to the time zones does not affect the intake of nutritious food which will help boost their metabolism and give them stamina to perform in their demanding job. A health food canteen with a nutritionist and dietician who can plan the daily healthy menus will go a long way in solving this problem. An attending mental health professional should be employed to deal with emotional problems that abound in BPOs.

Role of Government

After the economic reforms of 1991-92, liberalization of external trade, elimination of duties on imports of information technology products, relaxation of controls on both inward and outward investments and foreign exchange and the fiscal measures taken by the Government of India and the individual State Governments specifically for IT and ITES have been major contributory factors for the sector to flourish in India and for the country to be able to acquire a dominant position in offshore services in the world. The major fiscal incentives provided by the Government of India have been for the Export Oriented Units (EOU), Software Technology Parks (STP), and Special Economic Zones (SEZ).

The Government will review the rules drafted under the Shops and Business Establishments Act governing the working conditions of employees in business process outsourcing (BPO) companies. The Government has received several suggestions to improve the service conditions of employees of BPO firms, particularly that of women who work during the night. After a thorough study of the suggestions and consultations with the managements and employees of BPO companies, the rules will be amended.

The Government amended the Shops and Business Establishments Act in 2002, following a representation made by the managements of the BPO firms to enable them to employ women in night shifts. Although the labour laws of the land apply to the ITES-BPO sector, various exemptions from crucial labour laws have been granted to the sector by the government.

The Government has a major role in making gender inclusivity a reality. For organizations with a certain number of employees, the government can make mandatory to have in-house crèches and day-care centers. Another way is to provide benefits for professional home care for working families, or giving tax exemptions to organizations that hire a certain number of women professionals. The government can make provisions for small companies to provide training to their women workforce and help in their infrastructure development. In order to ensure overall development, the government should encourage companies in tier-2 and tier-3 cities to implement such policies. It can make education mandatory up to professional training and provide incentives to families in lower income group. The government policy on women employment in night-shift and other regulatory aspects point to a certain lack of policy consistency and enthusiasm on the part of the government towards creating a conducive environment.

The clarifications of government that all the labour laws are equally applicable to the sector and the ongoing efforts of Government towards effective policy formulation are also suggesting towards the emergence of a more encouraging framework for healthy trade unionism in the sector. Thus, the approaches of various stakeholders towards collectivity in the sector are gradually changing and the worker associations are increasingly being viewed as desirable institutions to improve workplace relations and social dialogue.

The ITES owners and managers, governments and relevant international bodies have to consider the adoption of a universal charter. Recognition of a universal charter with

clauses respecting minimum labour standards, core labour relations rights, healthy and safe work conditions, ceilings on work hours and employee representation are essential to protect the interest not only of the ITES employees but also of the ITES industries themselves.

Although much has been talked about the immense opportunities created by the BPOs in the developing countries, not much has been stated regarding the challenges faced by these organizations. Addressing these issues and creating a healthy work environment would be a win-win situation for both employers and government.

Conclusion

The present study is intended to investigate the psychosocial concerns of women employees working in few select BPOs in Bangalore and Mangalore. The result of the study in terms of aims and objectives suggest that BPOs have an impact on the psychosocial concerns of women employees, in terms of coping patterns and feeling of insecurity. Work stress and job related factors are chief reasons for psychosocial concerns of women employees in call centres. It highlights a strong need of support from all stakeholders. Hence, it is gaining a considerable amount of importance in the areas of Social Work, Organizational Behavior and Industrial Psychology.

The findings of this research provide new information related to the psycho-social concerns, work stress and job related problems and well-being of women. The findings suggest a number of general themes and reflect a broad range of experiences. While some study participants found their work fulfilling, others found it quite stressful. The findings identify several features of call centre work that impacted negatively, or had the potential to impact negatively, on the well-being of the women worker, such as having to follow scripted dialogues, heavy workloads, long hours of work, excessive supervision and monitoring, job insecurity, interference with family responsibilities and unpredictable work schedules.

According to some respondents, employment itself may contribute to a sense of well-being. Other factors that impacted positively on well-being include: opportunities for social interaction with co-workers, a sense of personal fulfillment which came from having the opportunity to talk with people on the phone, as well as the knowledge that they were serving and helping people. Some women felt that their work gave them greater

self-confidence and that they were valued, trusted and listened to by their employer and respected by friends and family. Some married women felt that they could come back to work even after marriage and children. In addition, the relative ease with which they could obtain work in a call centre and the increased economic security was an added advantage.

Unpredictable work schedules did not allow them to lead a personal life outside of work and that it interfered with family responsibilities and quality time with family and friends. Irregular hours, combined with lunch breaks that were too short and/or poorly timed, lead to unhealthy eating habits.

The study further reveals that the basic profile of the call centre employees include being young, polished, diplomatic, worldly shrewd attitude, experienced and educated. Since the call centre job entails interacting with clients, they have to believe in the philosophy customer is always right. The call centre job does not need in general any particular area of specialization. The job is repetitive, monotonous and thus requires high concrete ability.

Implications for Mandates and Research Programs

1. Generate Knowledge

   Call centres represent a rapidly expanding, yet relatively under-researched industry that employs thousands of women. Through direct interaction with women employed in call centres, researcher has uncovered new and critical information about aspects of call centre work that influences the health and well-being of women. The findings of this research indicate the need for future exploration of the psychosocial factors of impacting on the health of women call centre workers.

2. Information

   The information generated from this study contributes to knowledge about the psychological, social, health, work stress and job related effects on the women employees and their job satisfaction. Furthermore, the findings of this will inform the development of a questionnaire that may be used to collect data from large samples of call centre workers.

3. Policy Advice

   The findings of this study, when combined with the results of a large-scale survey, will make a valuable contribution to government and health constituencies in the development of policies and programs related to the call centre industry in general and female call centre workers in particular.

4. Communication

   The findings of this research are suitable for presentation in academic journals, government publications, community newsletters, and educational materials. Future conferences and paper publications will ensure that these findings are incorporated into a diverse body of literature related to the field of Social Work, psychosocial determinants of health, occupational health, women's health, women's work and the women working in call centres.

5. Networking

   Through sharing their insights, perceptions and experiences, study participants had an opportunity to explore some of the work-related determinants of their mental health. In doing so, they have further developed their awareness of work-related issues, their knowledge of the determinants of mental health and their capacities for affecting change. By including women of diverse experiences and through partnership with government organizations and community organizations, this research ensures that the voices of women call centre workers will inform other women who may be considering employment in the call centre industry.

Suggestions and Recommendations

The present study helped to gain insight into core areas of psycho-social, work stress and job related problems that need attention of all stakeholders. Generally, the working conditions and management practices in the BPOs promote individualism and act against development of collective attitude among the workers. The findings of face-to-face interviews provide in-depth information concerning the influences of call centre work on women's health and job satisfaction. Based on the findings the researcher has reflected certain areas that could be focused to promote the well being of women employees.

Implication for Social Work

Social workers have an important role to play in the welfare and development of women call centre workers, including assisting government and voluntary organizations to amend policies and plans. Social workers need to develop modules to train and support these women call centre workers; provide therapeutic interventions to the respondents and organize training programmes that improve the women's mental health and thus ability to address their concerns. Social workers may work with other professionals and organizations who are active in this sector.

Psychosocial support and Mental Health services thus have an important role to play, to cope with the challenges faced by these women in this sector. Social workers play a prominent role in providing psychosocial support and Mental Health services to the women respondents to move towards attaining work/life balance. The impact of psychosocial concerns of women in this sector is generally on a larger population. Reaching out to such a wide affected population is a big challenge before the Professional Social Workers.

- Changes in Organizational Policies in consultation with women employees; like adequate number of paid holidays, sick leave, compensatory leave equivalent to the over worked hours, autonomy in tasks, flexibility and so on. Proactive measures like team building, performance recognition, promotion and pay rises may be introduced.

- Procedures should be developed in consultation with employees, safety and health representatives and include procedures for:
  - call transfer;
  - dealing with difficult customers ;
  - reporting of any issues that arise;
  - where appropriate, adequate 'timeout' periods when contact with difficult customers causes tension and/or distress;
  - debriefing sessions following difficult calls; and
  - follow-up by supervisory staff on any issues that arise

Consultation between employer and employees and safety and health representatives must take place to develop and implement safe work procedures. This may include providing opportunities for all employees to participate in the development of workplace policy and procedures; clear definition of duties; adequate opportunities for employees to provide feedback on work place issues; conflict resolution procedures in which grievances and conflict are treated seriously, objectively and promptly; setting realistic and attainable performance measurement targets and developing clear policies on performance monitoring.

While some degree of job stress is inevitable, its impact on well-being can be moderated by support services designed to help workers deal with stress. Practically easy ways of alleviating stress at the initial level could be identified such as talking it out with supervisors or other support staff, taking short breaks, keeping a positive attitude, varying their work pace, encouragement of dialogue and interactivity between senior women professionals and their juniors to help alleviate stress levels and engaging in personal health and wellness activities such as physical exercise or relaxation techniques.

The use of prevention-focused interventions at the organisational level will further help the women respondents to cope with stress. These are more sustainable than rehabilitation or individual-level interventions.

- Interventions should reflect a holistic organizational approach.
- A sound risk assessment is vital for the design of stress interventions.
- Commitment, involvement and support from top management are crucial.
- Training and guidance should always be provided.
- Evaluation is essential to ascertain the sustainability of efforts.
- Research evidence can be used to identify and share good practice.
- Constructive partnerships at all levels are important for the co-ordination of efforts.
- Introduction of Holistic Health Care Units.
- Establishment of counselling centers and providing counselling sessions.
- Employ HR Professionals with knowledge of Human Psychology in BPO units/call centers.

Companies must address the safety of those working outside standard business hours. This should include:

- addressing security issues particularly for the safety of shift workers who arrive or leave the workplace outside of standard business hours.
- providing safe lighting for workers arriving and departing at night;
- providing safe access to toilet and washroom amenities;
- providing safe parking arrangements, where practicable. This could include installing secure perimeters around the car park;
- where necessary, providing security escorts for those leaving the workplace.
- considering allocating more than one day off in seven when night work exceeds two consecutive shifts between 10.00 p.m. and 8.00 a.m.
- giving at least 24 hours' notice before night work;
- minimising irregular or unfamiliar work rosters;
- minimising night work when employees return from leave or an extended period away to allow them time to adapt; and
- considering alternatives to night shifts.
- efficient complaint redressal systems made compulsory for all employers.
- self-defence training to women,
- installing CCTVs at the workplace to prevent sexual harassment,
- police verification of cab drivers, security guards and peons working in BPOs.
- A pool of drivers having established credentials should be created to provide reliable substitutes in case the need arises.
- Call centre owners should seek permission of the police before deciding upon a location for setting up a call centre.

Good Practices To Be Followed In-House

- A thorough induction process that spells out to the employees the work hours, transport arrangements and familiarity with organisation rules.
- Educate the employees about correct lifestyle especially in diet patterns and exercise as the after effects, imbalances and complications show up in long term.
- Employees to be given a laminated card that lists numbers of the transport help desk along with those of senior persons who can be approached in case of an emergency.
- Single shift with fixed week offs for a period of time so that it is easier for the employees to fulfill both their biological needs and social obligations.
- Sensitive towards the health concerns of the employees and keep emphasising on small but significant issues like placement of footrest, eye level to monitors, the right posture to sit while working on a PC, changing weather and requisites to take care of health, implications of eating junk food.
- Training and education to strike a balance between physical and mental rhythm to synchronise the body clock.

Gender Friendly Measures

- Call centres need to ensure third party representation in committees set up. It is necessary and expedient for employers as well as HR and institutions to observe certain guidelines to ensure prevention of sexual harassment of women.
- Call centres should not depend entirely on police patrolling. As a business organisation, they ought to take adequate measures to guarantee the safety of women as mandated by the amendment to the Factories Act. The amendment to the Act which allows women to work between 10 pm and 6 am in Information Technology (IT) among other sectors clearly puts the onus of ensuring safety of women employees on the employer.

Government

- Make it mandatory for companies to install GPS in cabs to have a stronger monitoring.

- Develop policies which will provide greater opportunities to women for onsite projects and suggest that women be made an integral part of recruitment and appraisal committees. Identifying women with leadership potential early and providing them with training, and conducting mentorship programs for female employees.
- Provide support through policies which help women tide over personal issues (policies for recruitment after a break) and constantly discuss and assess the need for gender specific policies with the women themselves.

In the field of Research

Future research activities should aim to determine factors to understand both positive and negative aspects of call centre work.

Recommendations for further work:

- To make a prospective study among call centre operators, where different exposures and health are studied over a time period. With a prospective study it is possible to explain if there is a causal relationship between work-related factors and health.
- To study the effects of work organisations on call centre operators.
- To study and make deeper analysis of the work content at call centres and try to identify potential stressors which is more significantly affecting women.
- Comparative studies on women with men on any health related issues of call centre. Thus further in-depth study in this area is desirable.
- It seems that now there is a need for more thorough studies on organizing strategies of different initiatives at the grass root level so that all the emerging new and effective tools can be synthesized to build a comprehensive strategy for unionization in the BPO sector.
- Comparative study between women employees from different places working in BPOs for e.g. women employees working in BPOs in Bangalore and Mumbai.

It is the endeavour of the Human Resource Department to look into the human aspects of any work in any organization. Human beings are not to be considered as machines at

work but they should be considered as human resources and not just a source of labour for getting the work done. Giving proper attention and value to them will only guarantee an organization better economic rewards and prosperity in the future. The professionals can do wonders in BPO sectors as well. People are the backbone of BPO industry and it is certain that professional HR or Mental Health Professionals/Counsellors can make inroad in this emerging organization and facilitate the growth of organization in an immense way.

While already a significant amount of work is being done by IT-BPO companies to encourage women employees on their rosters, more can be done. There are still a large number of areas where women-friendly policies and facilities simply do not exist, a fact that can greatly deter women from entering or staying on in the IT-BPO industry.

It is hoped that the findings of the study would contribute to the service and welfare of women employees working in BPOs/Call centre.

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